Alberta: Health First

Building a better public health care system

Alberta government response to the Premier's Advisory Council on Health report

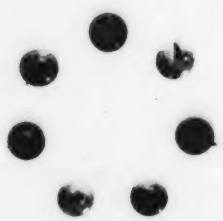
January 2002

alberta
HEALTH FIRST

Our vision: build a better public health care system for Albertans

On January 8, 2002, the Premier's Advisory Council on Health released its report on how to put Alberta's health care system on a sustainable foundation. The report focuses on people—those who use and provide health care—and makes recommendations on building wellness, collaboration, accountability and innovation as keys to a quality health care system, now and for the future.

Our plan: take action on health now



The government has responded with a plan of action on health—a plan that starts now on building a stronger public health care system for our children and grandchildren.

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Directions for action

Staying healthy and improving the health of Albertans

This direction includes:

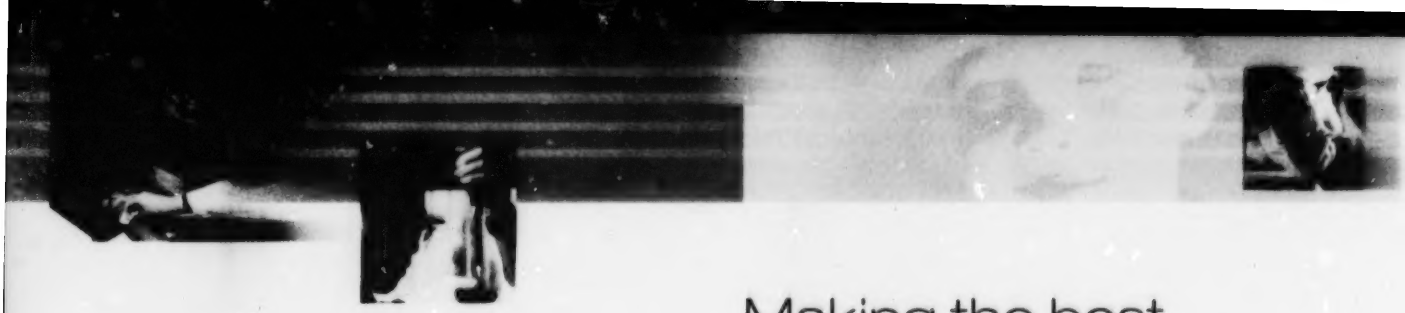
A wellness program will set targets for better health. Albertans will be encouraged to follow healthier lifestyles, such as increasing their level of physical activity and reducing their use of tobacco. The program will aim for better health in the general population, including lower rates of diabetes, heart disease and injury. A public information and health promotion campaign will be launched in the fall of 2002.

The government will work with health organizations like the Canadian Diabetes Association and the Alberta Heart Health Network to develop Web site links to give Albertans factual health information.

Alberta will discuss updating the Canada Food Guide with other governments in Canada and provide input into Health Canada's review of the guide next year.

Kindergarten to Grade 9 students will learn about health and life skills in a new program of studies in September 2002. Topics in the program will include active living, good health habits, nutrition, preventing substance abuse and illness, and safety and responsibility.

Tobacco taxes will be increased in spring 2002, as part of a broader strategy to reduce the use of tobacco products by Albertans.



Providing quality service

This direction includes:

A committee on collaboration and innovation will encourage greater co-operation among regional health authorities. Health authorities will be asked to share contracts for services such as diagnostic services, and consider establishing contracts with private, public and not-for-profit organizations to offer more choices in how Albertans receive services. The committee will also encourage health authorities to develop centres of specialization for specific medical procedures, treatment of certain conditions, or prevention and promotion activities.

Alberta Health and Wellness will work with physicians and regional health authorities to identify services that will have a 90-day access guarantee. The guarantees will start to take effect in 2003.

A Web site posting information on wait times for selected procedures will be launched in 2003.

A centralized booking system for selected procedures to allow patients to find a surgeon and facility that matches their needs, will be available in 2006.

Primary health care reform will see an increased use of care groups, which involve a range of health professionals, and new approaches to care for people with chronic diseases over the next three years.

Province-wide access to telephone based health information will be available in 2003 to provide health advice and information to Albertans.

Mental health services will be fully integrated into regional health authority services by March 2003. A transition plan that ensures continuous patient care will be developed in the spring of 2002.

Making the best use of health professionals

This direction includes:

A database that tracks how many health care workers we have, what work they do, and other workforce indicators such as absenteeism and illness rates, will be developed by the end of 2004. This information will help regional health authorities and Alberta Health and Wellness to improve planning for future staffing needs. This will complement the work already underway to expand post-secondary training spaces for health professionals.

A comprehensive workforce plan will be completed in 2002 to provide an appropriate supply of health care workers to serve future needs.

Regional health authorities will be asked to develop initiatives to increase work satisfaction and employee retention. Alberta Health and Wellness will assist the health authorities to develop strategies by September 2002.

The implementation of the *Health Professions Act* over the next five years will lead to more effective use of health care providers' skills.

Options for paying physicians will be discussed in the next round of bargaining with the Alberta Medical Association later this year. The target is to have 50 per cent of physicians moving into alternative payment plans, such as rosters, contracts or salaries, by 2005.

Alberta Health and Wellness is developing payment systems that will reduce administration around physician billing outside of the fee-for-service system.

Primary health care reform initiatives will encourage providers to explore different approaches to care and service delivery.

Paying for health care

This direction includes:

An MLA task force will be established in February 2002 to provide recommendations on alternate revenue sources for regional health authorities, and recommend a provincial funding framework by September, 2002.

An expert advisory panel to review insured health services will be created in February 2002. The panel will include medical, clinical and health policy experts and public representatives. Panel members will make recommendations on what services should be insured by August 30, 2002, and develop criteria for reviewing new services and treatments by October 31, 2002.

Alberta will continue to work with other provinces and territories on a common drug assessment process, best practices in prescribing and use, and a national drug utilization information system, faster approval of generic drugs and bulk purchasing of drugs.

Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan premiums will increase in the spring of 2002, the first increase since 1995.

Achieving value and results

This direction includes:

A Health Services Utilization and Outcomes Commission will report regularly to Albertans on our health and the effectiveness of the health care system.

The roles and responsibilities of regional health authorities will be reviewed by May 31, 2002. New multi-year contracts between Alberta Health and Wellness and regional health authorities will be implemented by April 2004. These contracts will include performance targets that health authorities will be expected to meet.

Taking advantage of technology

This direction includes:

An electronic health information system will be created, to provide better information that would improve health outcomes. With permission from the patient, health records can be accessed by regional health authorities, physicians and other health care providers to provide timely and accurate diagnosis and the best care possible. The government will invest in province-wide hardware, software and data development to support electronic health information, beginning in 2003. Province-wide health information technology standards will be developed by the fall of 2003.

A pilot project on electronic health records will be tested during 2002 and 2003.

Encouraging innovation

This direction includes:

Health research will continue to grow as a key contributor to Alberta's economic growth and reputation for medical excellence. Support for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Alberta Science and Research Authority, the Institute of Health Economics, as well as the development of centres of excellence such as Genome Prairie and the cardiac research and bone and joint centres in Edmonton and Calgary will continue.

The government will continue to work with the health industry to help introduce and market new technology and products developed in Alberta.

The development of functional foods and nutraceuticals — food or dietary supplements that provide medical or health benefits — will be a focus of the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute.

Action starts now

Underway:

- Development of a comprehensive health workforce plan
- Development of electronic health records
- Co-operation with other provinces and territories to reduce drug costs
- $26 million for Student Health Initiative

2002:

- Tobacco taxes to increase
- Alberta Health Care Insurance premiums to increase
- Expert panel to review publicly funded services
- MLA task force to review revenue options
- Expansion of primary health care reform
- Committee to explore options for providing health care services
- Action to revise the Canada Food Guide
- Population health targets and objectives
- Information technology funding strategy
- Health Services Utilization and Outcomes Commission established
- Partnerships for health information
- Public information campaign to promote healthy lifestyles

2003:

- Pilot test of electronic patient medication records
- Web site on wait times for selected procedures
- 90-day access guarantee for selected services
- Funding for health information technology established
- New agreement with the Alberta Medical Association to expand options to pay physicians
- Integration of mental health services with health regions
- Province-wide telephone information service

2004:

- Multi-year contracts between Alberta Health and Wellness and regional health authorities

2006:

- Central booking services for selected procedures

Committed to action

Your government is committed to action on health. Some initiatives will start immediately, and some will be brought in gradually over the next few years.

Regular reports will be made on our progress. You can also expect detailed information as changes are made to the province's health care system, on how those changes will affect you and your family and how you use the health care system.

Public health care has a bright future

Albertans can be confident their public health care system will be maintained and improved for now and for the future. This is a made-in-Alberta approach to building a better health care system.

Connect with us

We invite your questions and comments on the Alberta government action plan and encourage you to track its progress.

Contact us at:

310-4455
(toll-free anywhere in Alberta)

www.gov.ab.ca

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